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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002387

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: DIYARBAKIR SYRIACS THREATENED, LOCAL IMAMS  
ENCOURAGE ANTI-CHRISTIAN SENTIMENT

Classified by Consulate Adana Principal Officer W. Scott  
Reid, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This message is from Consulate Adana.

12. (C) Summary: A group of men recently entered the compound of Diyarbakir,s ancient Syriac Christian Church and uttered threats and insults at the Syriac members. Despite requests from the Syriacs and other residents in the neighborhood of the church, the Turkish National Police (TNP) did not send officers to the area to provide security until the church,s attorney was roughed up by some of the group members the day after the initial incident. After repeated calls to the TNP and mayor, the TNP also agreed to send a patrol to the area during the Syriac Christian Easter celebration on April 23. Local Religious Affairs Directorate officials have been unresponsive to complaints by the church,s attorney regarding unauthorized inflammatory sermons by local imams encouraging anti-Christian sentiment. Syriac Christians reproached Protestant counterparts, claiming that Protestant missionary activities had been the cause of the Syriacs, recent troubles. The Syriac Bishop for the region, whose seat is at a Syriac Christian monastery near Midyat, is worried that government efforts to stop anti-Christian activities are inadequate, and that the government is ratcheting up anti-Christian pressure. End summary.

Syriacs Threatened and Insulted  
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13. (C) During a recent Adana consulate trip to Diyarbakir, Diyarbakir Syriac Church priest Yusuf Akbulut told us that on April 15 a man roughly 35 years old accompanied by 7-8 teenagers entered the Syriac Church compound. Some members of the 5-6 Syriac families who live there stopped the men from entering the chapel because they were smoking. Akbulut said that at this point the older man started swearing at the Syriac children loudly and denouncing Christianity and the U.S. When Akbulut came out of a nearby office to investigate the noise, the older man swore at him about Syriacs being Christian crusaders, America,s presence in Iraq, etc. Akbulut said the man kept reaching behind his coat as if he were concealing a weapon. Several youths with him did so as well, but no one actually saw any weapons. The intruders continued to make statements to the effect that the Syriacs would be made to pay for their faith, and threatened to cut

the Syriac Christians, throats in sacrificial fashion. Akbulut said that the Syriacs refused to open the locked church sanctuary door and, after a few minutes, the intruders left by walking around the city-block-sized church compound wall while screaming insults at the Syriacs. No one was injured in the incident.

¶4. (C) Akbulut told us that he immediately called the TNP, but they responded that the intruding group had left the area and that many citizens in the district had called asking for security, but the police were swamped with requests. The TNP told Akbulut that they would not send a patrol to the area since the immediate threat had passed. (Note: This neighborhood is almost 100 percent Kurdish, very poor and flanked by a neighborhood which featured many clashes between demonstrators and security forces during the civil unrest two weeks earlier. TNP are not seen there often. End note.)

¶5. (C) Akbulut said that on April 16, some of the teenagers from the intruding group pushed around and hit several times the Syriac church,s attorney, Muhammet Akar, who is a Diyarbakir Justice and Development Party (AKP) Provincial Board member. After Akar called, a TNP patrol came to the area. After further calls by Akbulut and Akar to the local mayoral office, the TNP offered to send a patrol to the area for the upcoming Syriac Easter celebration. The local Bar Association and the Human Rights Association released press statements condemning the attacks.

#### Imams Preach Anti-Christian Sentiment

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¶6. (C) In an April 20 meeting we had with Akbulut, attorney Akar criticized the slow reactions of the TNP and offered his

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opinion that recent Friday sermons delivered in Diyarbakir were encouraging anti-Christian sentiment, particularly against missionary activity. Akar said he had asked the Diyarbakir AKP Chairman, Abdurrahman Kurt, to seek more responsive TNP engagement, producing a promise for TNP protection of the Syriac church when it celebrated Easter on April 23. TNP did send a unit, for which Akbulut expressed gratitude to Akar and us. Akar also said that he had complained to local Diyanet (Religious Affairs Directorate) officials about the inflammatory sermon, which he said deviated from the Diyanet-issued text, but found them unresponsive and encountered several new arrivals, who were retired, but recalled to Diyanet service, who were adamant about their intent to continue such calls.

#### Christian Groups Divided Over Missionary Work

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¶7. (C) In a recent letter by Diyarbakir,s Protestant Church Pastor Ahmet Guvener to a U.S. Congressman,s staffer, which was forwarded to us, the pastor mentioned that their Syriac Christian neighbors reproached the Protestants, implying that their missionary activities were the cause of the Syriacs, recent trouble. In the letter, the Protestants told the Syriacs that they were compelled to continue proselytizing, and called on the Syriacs to pray for understanding to overcome the &coldness8 that had come between the two Christian groups. Guvener independently raised these tensions in discussions with us, indicating his intent not to change his activities.

#### Syriac Monastery Also Worried

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¶8. (C) Syriac Bishop Samuel Aktas of Dayrul Umur Monastery told us he was worried about recent threats against Christians in the region and about pressure he was feeling from the government and the jandarma. Aktas said that Christians in the region were scared that the government was not doing enough to stop anti-Christian threats. He

explained that Syriacs were slowing their return from the U.S. to re-build homes in the Midyat region after being dislocated during government anti-insurgency operations in the early 1990s. Aktas compared the current situation to incidents in 1997, when the Syriacs received pressure from the government to abandon the Dayrul Umur Monastery. Aktas said that difficulties he had had with the government at that time had caused a two-year delay in the monastery's reconstruction and restoration efforts. He added that land deed problems continue between the GOT and recently-returned Syriacs seeking to re-establish ownership rights after being expelled.

19. (C) Aktas told us that a local jandarma officer recently came to the monastery and warned him that the region was experiencing a resurgence of activity by the PKK, Hizbullah and other Islamic extremist groups. (Comment: This was a common line of the Syriacs during the clashes of the 1990s, when the GoT tried to sway the Syriacs to act as adjuncts to the village guards and serve as GoT informants. End Comment.) Aktas added that the Dutch Ambassador to Turkey, who had recently visited the monastery, told him FM Gul had told the Ambassador that the reason the GOT did not support giving full rights to Christians in Turkey was because it would set a bad precedent for giving similar rights to other groups, such as Kurds, Alevis and Arab minorities.

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